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AMAR CHITRA KATHA

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AMAR CHITRA KATHA

VAISHNO DEVI

GODDESS OF THE HILLS

The route to your roots

Founder Editor: Anant Pai

VAISHNO DEVI

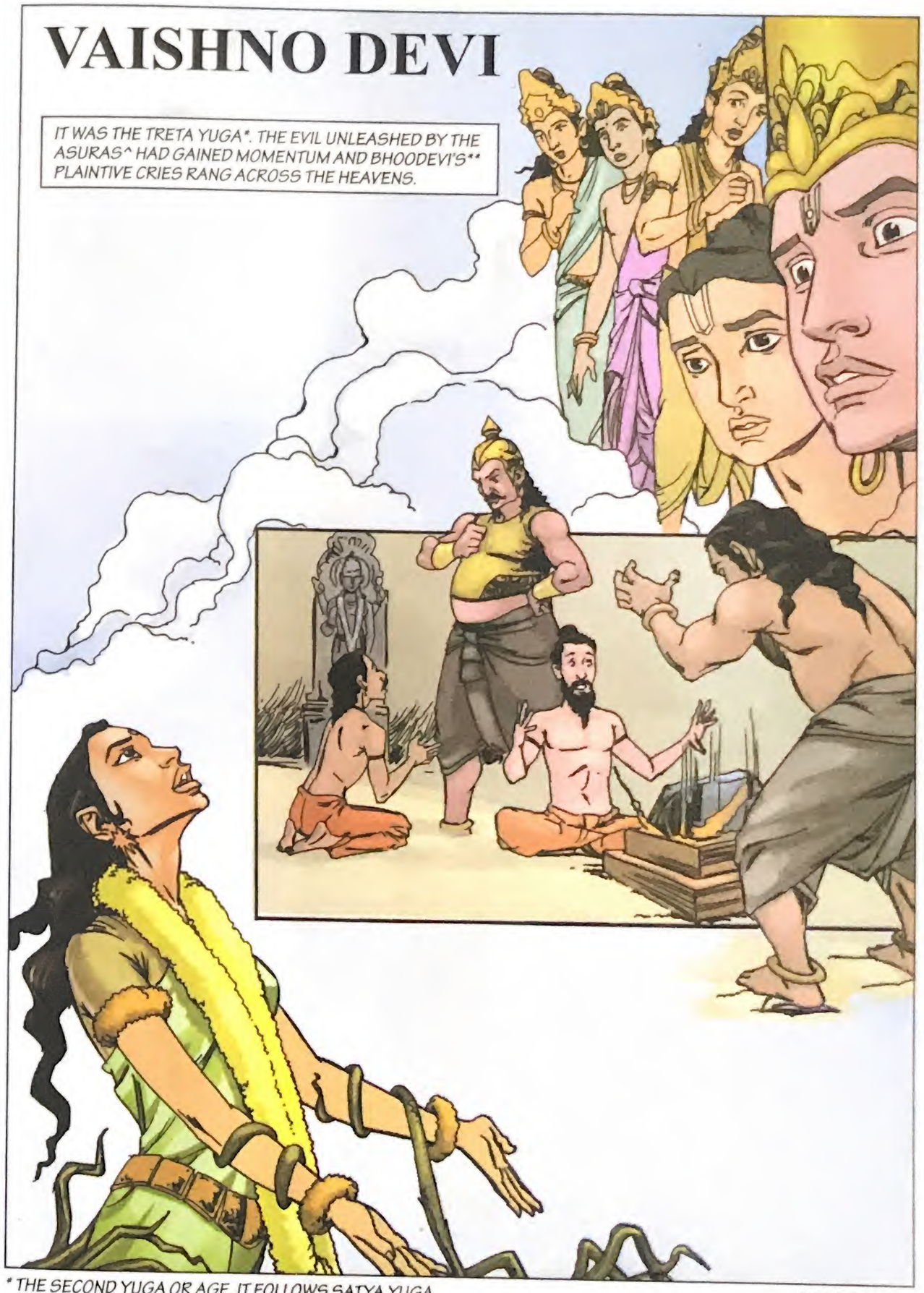
Bhoodevi, the earth, was being ravaged by evil asuras. She turned to the gods for aid but even the powerful trinity of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva, were helpless.

Concerned by the events, their consorts, Saraswati, Lakshmi and Parvati combined their powers and created Vaishnavi, a woman of unsurpassed strength. Vaishnavi fought and destroyed the asuras but the goddesses asked her to stay on and not return to heaven. Though Vaishnavi did not realise it, her story was only just beginning.

Amar Chitra Katha tells the story of Vaishnavi's transformation into the meditating goddess, Vaishno Devi, whose abode in the Himalayas is visited by millions of pilgrims every year.

Script : Aruna Balakrishna Singh **Illustrations and cover :** Durgesh Velhal

Colour & Layout : Adarsh Achari, Anil Kumar M. & Subramanian



THE GODS, BRAHMA, VISHNU AND SHIVA WONDERED WHAT TO DO.

THE ASURAS HAVE GAINED IN STRENGTH.

WHAT CAN WE DO? WE HAVE GRANTED THEM MANY BOONS WHICH ARE NOW WORKING AGAINST US.

NOT FAR AWAY, THEIR CONSORTS* WATCHED THEM.

OUR HUSBANDS SEEM SO DISTURBED. WISH WE COULD HELP THEM....

I THINK WE CAN. COME WITH ME.

AND SO -

OUR COLLECTIVE ENERGY WILL BRING FORTH A POWER SO GREAT, THAT SHE WILL BE UNDEFEATABLE IN BATTLE AND WILL RID EARTH OF HER SUFFERING.

* SARASWATI, LAKSHMI AND PARVATI

SOON -

BEHOLD, VAISHNAVI, THE SUM OF OUR POWERS, UNASSAILABLE IN BATTLE BY GOD OR DEMON!

WHY HAVE YOU BROUGHT ME HERE, O MOTHERS?

VAISHNAVI, WE HAVE GIVEN YOU UNSURPASSABLE STRENGTH TO RID MOTHER EARTH OF HER SUFFERING AT THE HANDS OF THE ASURAS. GO, DEFEAT THEM AND BE VICTORIOUS.

SO -

HA! A MERE WOMAN LIKE YOU CANNOT KILL ME. I HAVE A BOON THAT MAKES ME INDESTRUCTIBLE.

BUT –

SOON, THE DEMONS WERE VANQUISHED–

I HAVE COMPLETED THE TASK YOU SET, O MOTHERS. WHAT SHOULD I DO NOW?

AS YOU WISH, MOTHER.

YOUR WORK ON EARTH IS NOT YET COMPLETE. YOU MUST LIVE HERE AND HELP BHOODEVI UPHOLD RIGHTEOUSNESS AND GOOD FOR HER CHILDREN.

IN THE HOME OF A CHILDLESS COUPLE –

HOW I WISH, WE HAD A CHILD....

RATNAKAR AND HIS WIFE WERE DEVOUT WORSHIPPERS OF VISHNU.

THAT NIGHT, IN A DREAM –

O RATNAKAR, YOUR WISH WILL BE GRANTED. YOU WILL BE THE PROUD FATHER OF A BABY GIRL WHO WILL BE WORSHIPPED BY MILLIONS.

BEFORE LONG –

YOU HAVE A BEAUTIFUL DAUGHTER!

WAAAAH!!!

SHE IS LORD VISHNU'S BLESSING. I WILL NAME HER TRIKUTA.

TRIKUTA GREW UP TO BE AN ACCOMPLISHED AND BEAUTIFUL MAIDEN.

ONE DAY –

FATHER, I SEEK YOUR PERMISSION. I WISH TO DO PENANCE AND SEEK THE BLESSINGS OF LORD VISHNU.

SHE IS BUT A MERE CHILD, HOW CAN I LET HER GO? YET I MUST. SHE IS DESTINED FOR GREATER THINGS.

TRIKUTA REACHED THE SEASHORE.

WHAT A SERENE PLACE THIS IS, PERFECT FOR MY MEDITATION. I SHALL LIVE HERE AND SPEND MY DAYS MEDITATING ON THE LORD.

AND SO –

OM VISHNAVEH NAMAH....

ONE DAY –

I CAN SENSE SOMEONE APPROACHING. IT IS....

IT WAS VISHNU IN HIS INCARNATION AS RAMA. WITH RAMA WAS HIS BROTHER, LAKSHMANA.

IT IS MY LORD VISHNU, HIMSELF! BUT HE SEEMS TO BE PERTURBED, WHY IS IT, I WONDER?

O LORD, PLEASE ACCEPT THE OFFERINGS OF YOUR HUMBLE DEVOTEE.
WHAT BRINGS YOU SO FAR? YOU SEEM TO BE IN SEARCH OF SOMETHING.
I AM LOOKING FOR MY WIFE, SITA. SHE HAS BEEN TAKEN CAPTIVE BY RAVANA OF LANKA.

UPON HEARING THIS, TRIKUTA'S FACE FELL.
MY LORD ALREADY HAS A WIFE! WILL HE ACCEPT ME AS WELL?

RAMA UNDERSTOOD TRIKUTA'S THOUGHTS.
TRIKUTA, SITA IS MY WIFE AND I CANNOT ACCEPT ANOTHER. HOWEVER, I AM PLEASED WITH YOUR DEVOTION AND HENCEFORTH NAME YOU VAISHNAVI.

I WILL VISIT YOU AGAIN AFTER MY EXILE. IF YOU RECOGNIZE ME, I WILL GIVE YOU YOUR HEART'S DESIRE.

VAISHNAVI'S HAPPINESS KNEW NO BOUNDS.

THE LORD HAS ACCEPTED ME! MY PRAYERS HAVE BEEN ANSWERED. I CAN'T WAIT FOR THE DAY, WHEN HE WILL COME BACK.

VAISHNAVI AWAITED HER LORD'S RETURN.

ONE DAY –

O FAIR MAIDEN, YOU ARE TOO BEAUTIFUL TO BE LIVING ALONE IN SUCH A WILDERNESS. MARRY ME.

GO AWAY! I AM ALREADY BETROTHED TO THE LORD HIMSELF. HE IS ON HIS WAY TO ACCEPT ME.

O FAIR MAIDEN, DO YOU NOT RECOGNIZE WHO I AM?

RECOGNIZE YOU? I HAVEN'T SEEN YOU BEFORE IN MY LIFE....

AS SOON AS SHE UTTERED THE WORDS, VAISHNAVI REALISED HER FOLLY.

MY LORD, FORGIVE ME! IN MY HASTE AND ARROGANCE, I COULD NOT RECOGNIZE YOU.

RISE VAISHNAVI, THE TIME IS NOT RIGHT FOR US TO BE TOGETHER. YOUR WORK ON EARTH IS NOT YET COMPLETE. GO TO THE TRIKUTA HILLS^ IN THE NORTH AND CONTINUE YOUR MEDITATION THERE TILL KALIYUGA*...

^ IN MODERN DAY JAMMU.

* LAST OF THE FOUR YUGAS - THE AGE OF DESTRUCTION.

...WHEN WE SHALL BE UNITED AGAIN. TILL THEN, YOUR FAME WILL SPREAD FAR AND WIDE AND THOSE WHO COME TO YOU WILL BE FREED FROM SUFFERING.

HEEDING THE ADVICE OF RAMA, VAISHNAVI HEADED FOR THE TRIKUTA HILLS.

DURING HER JOURNEY SHE FACED MANY HARDSHIPS BEFORE SHE FINALLY REACHED TRIKUTA.

AS PREDICTED BY RAMA, VAISHNAVI'S FAME SPREAD FAR AND WIDE AND DEVOTEES FLOCKED TO HER.

AS TIME PASSED, STORIES ABOUT VAISHNAVI REACHED THE EARS OF A TANTRIK* CALLED GORAK NATH.

WHO IS THIS VAISHNAVI?

WITH HIS POWERS, GORAK NATH CAME TO KNOW OF VAISHNAVI'S MEETING WITH RAMA.

* ONE WHO PRACTICES TANTRA - A SPIRITUAL STUDY.

HE SENT FOR HIS MOST TRUSTED DISCIPLE, BHAIRON NATH.

FIND OUT WHO VAISHNAVI IS. WHY ARE PEOPLE GOING TO HER IN SUCH LARGE NUMBERS?

BHAIRON NATH STARTED IMMEDIATELY TO DO HIS MASTER'S BIDDING.

MY MASTER IS THREATENED BY A CHIT OF A GIRL!

WHO IS SHE, I WONDER?

HOWEVER, WHEN HE SET EYES ON VAISHNAVI -

AH! HER BEAUTY BLINDS ME!

I MUST MAKE HER MY WIFE.

WHEN EVERYONE HAD LEFT -

VAISHNAVI, I AM STRUCK BY YOUR BEAUTY AND VIRTUE. BE MY WIFE WILLINGLY OR I WILL CARRY YOU AWAY BY FORCE.

HOW DARE YOU SPEAK TO ME LIKE THAT! MY HEART IS SET ON VISHNU AND ONLY HE WILL BE MY HUSBAND.

UNDETERRED, BHAIRON RELENTLESSLY PURSUED VAISHNAVI.

FINALLY –

I CANNOT BEAR HIS ATTENTION. I MUST ESCAPE.

VAISHNAVI SET OFF WITH BHAIRON IN PURSUIT.

THE HOT SUN MADE HER THIRSTY. AND SO-

SHE CREATED A SPRING*.

*NOW CALLED BAN GANGA. BAN MEANS ARROW AND GANGA IS SYNONYMOUS WITH 'SACRED RIVER'.

* THIS PLACE IS TODAY KNOWN AS CHARAN PADUKA OR FOOTPRINT.

* THIS PLACE IS KNOWN AS ADH KUNWARI. THE CAVE IS ALSO CALLED GARBH JOON SIGNIFYING THE NINE MONTHS VAISHNAVI RESTED AS A BABY RESTS IN THE WOMB OF THE MOTHER.

BUT BHAIRON NATH DID NOT GIVE UP AND ONE DAY -

OLD MAN, DID YOU SEE A WOMAN PASS THIS WAY?

NO, I HAVE NOT...NO ONE HAS COME THIS WAY...

...BUT HEED MY ADVICE AND TURN BACK. SHE IS AN INCARNATION OF THE GODDESS HERSELF AND TO PURSUE HER LIKE THIS, WILL ONLY LEAD TO YOUR DESTRUCTION.

SO, YOU HAVE SEEN HER. A GODDESS, EH? WE WILL SOON SEE ABOUT THAT. SHE MUST BE HERE SOMEWHERE.

BHAIRON NATH DIVINED WHERE VAISHNAVI WAS HIDING.

SHE IS RIGHT HERE!

VAISHNAVI ALSO SENSED HIS PRESENCE.

BHAIRON NATH HAS FOUND MY REFUGE. I MUST LEAVE THIS PLACE.

SHE USED HER TRIDENT TO BLAST A HOLE IN THE WALL OF THE CAVE...

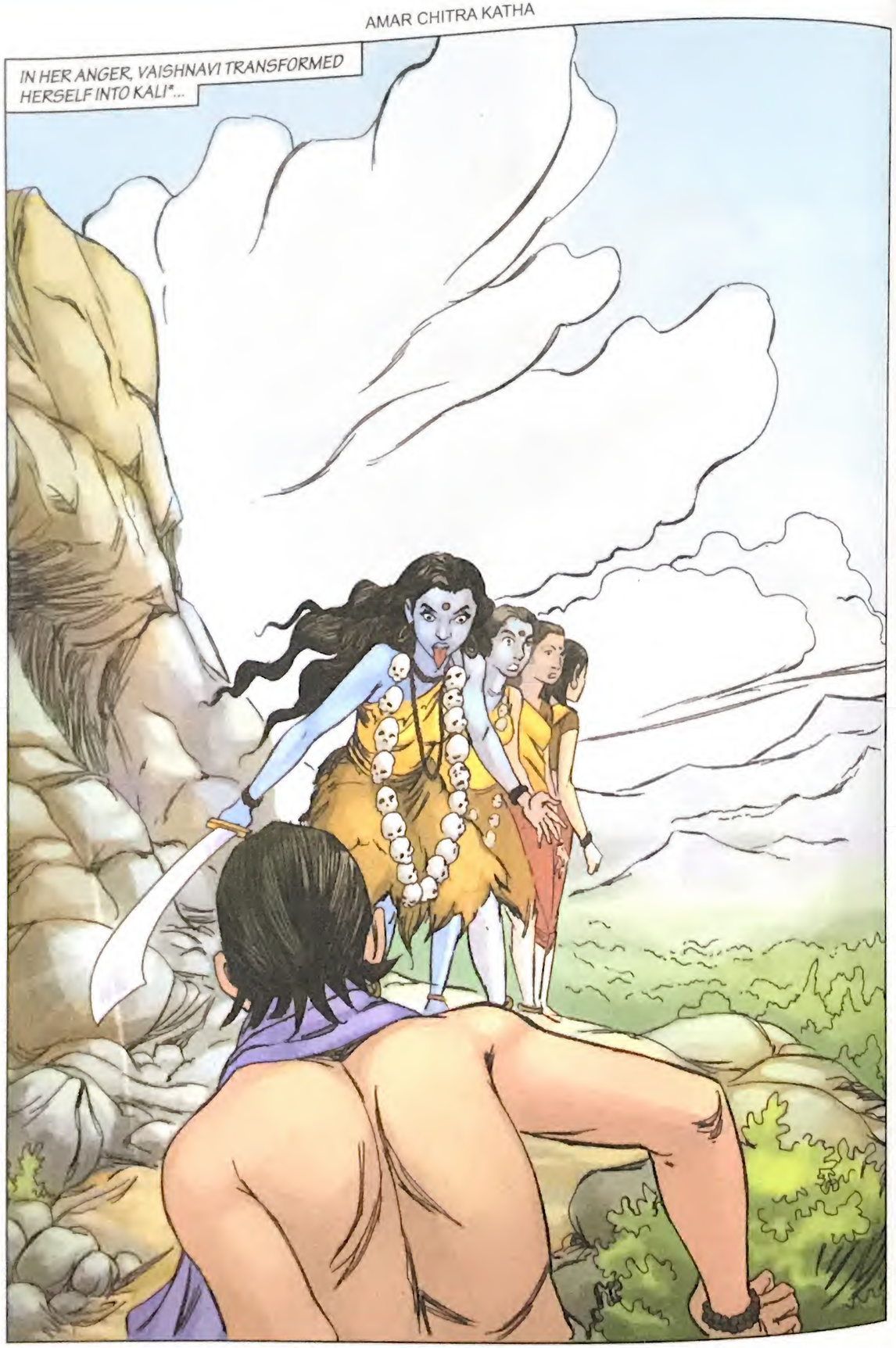
BOOOOMM!

...AND ESCAPED.

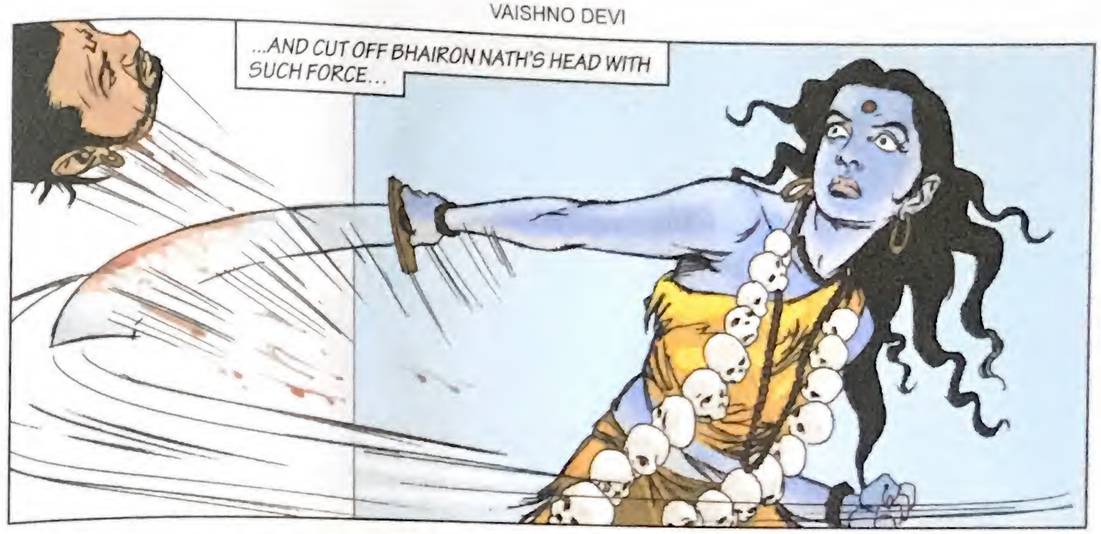
WITH BHAIRON NATH IN PURSUIT, VAISHNAVI KEPT GOING DEEPER INTO THE MOUNTAINS, TILL SHE REACHED ANOTHER CAVE IN THE HILLS.

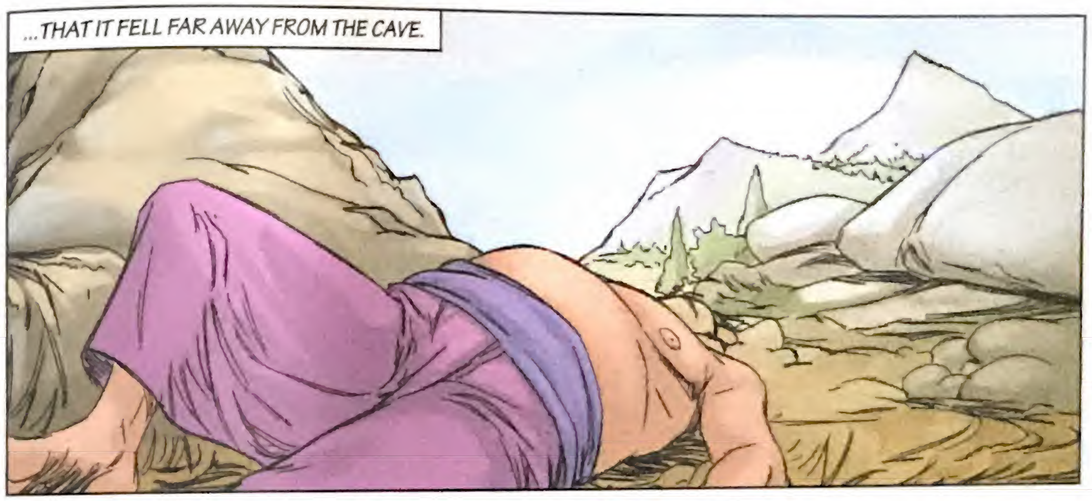
BHAIRON NATH HAS SUMMONED HIS OWN DEATH.

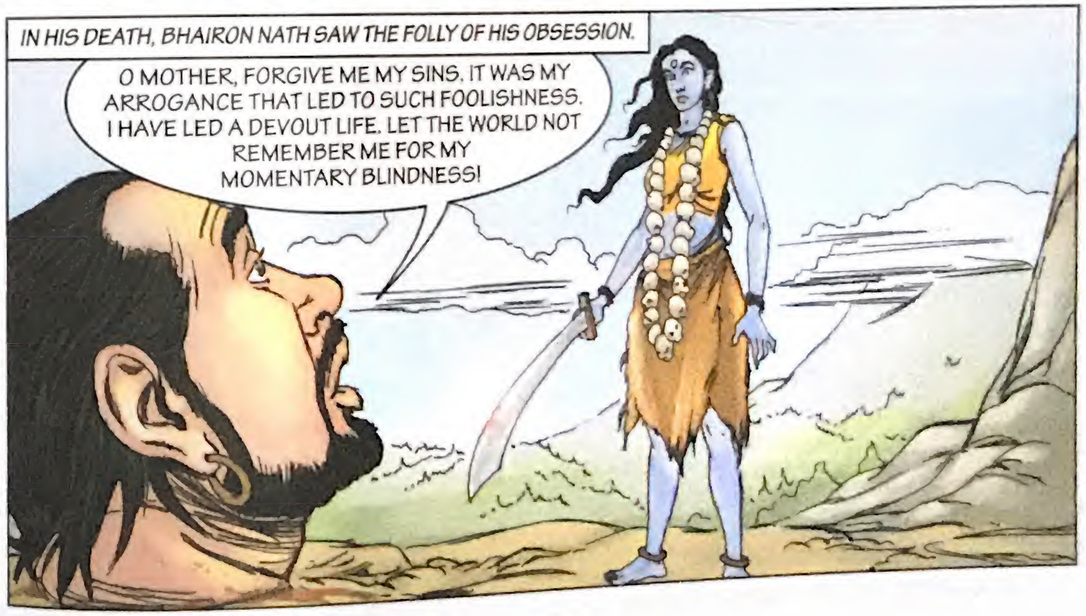
HA! HA! YOU CANNOT ESCAPE ME.

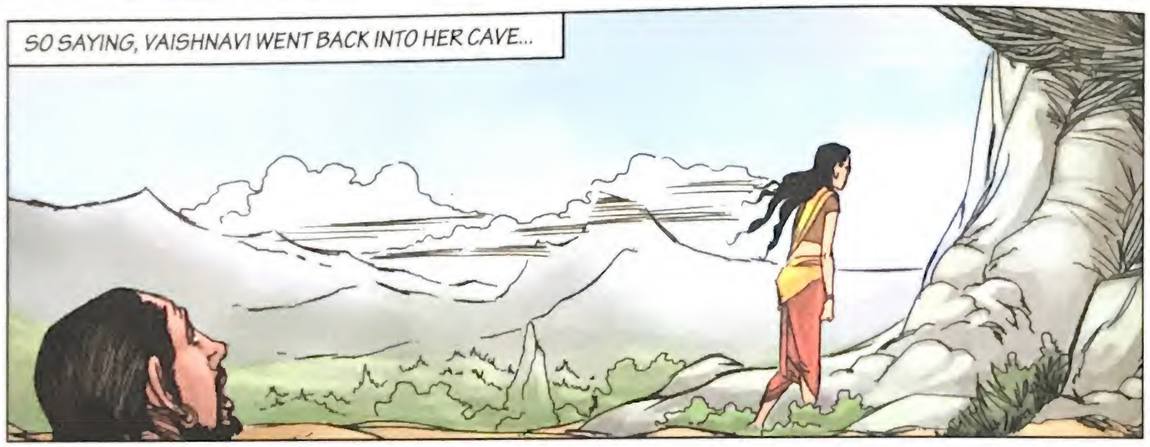


*GODDESS OF CHANGE AND DESTRUCTION









*THE GREATER FORMS OF THE THREE GODDESSES

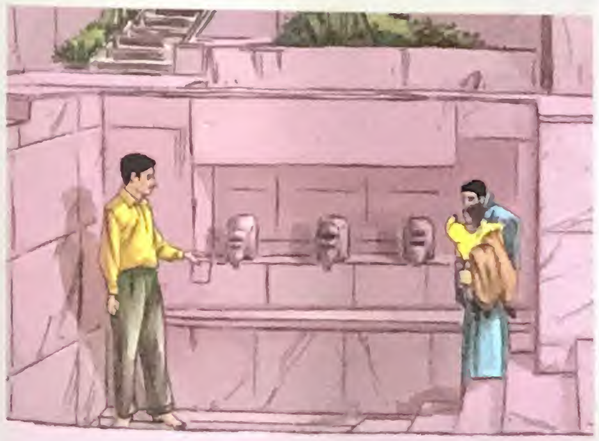
THE PLACE VAISHNAVI CHOSE TO MEDITATE IN, IS CALLED VAISHNO DEVI. IT IS IN THE STATE OF JAMMU. EVERY YEAR, MILLIONS OF PILGRIMS VISIT THE SHRINE, TO PAY THEIR RESPECTS TO HER. SOME OF THE PLACES THEY STOP AT, ON THE WAY UP, ARE:

DARSHANI DARWAAZA

THIS IS WHERE THE CLIMB TO THE HOLY SHRINE BEGINS. FROM THIS POINT, ONE CAN GET AN ENTIRE VIEW OF THE TRIKUTA MOUNTAINS. 'DARSHAN' MEANS 'TO VIEW' AND 'DARWAAZA' MEANS 'DOOR'.

SANJHI CHATT

IT IS A SMALL PLATEAU ON THE WAY TO THE HOLY SHRINE AND IS FAMOUS FOR ITS BEAUTIFUL VIEW OF THE VALLEY. SITUATED AT AN ALTITUDE OF 6200 FT, SANJHI CHATT IS THE HIGHEST POINT IN THE ENTIRE JOURNEY. AT THIS SPOT, THE UPHILL TREK STOPS AND THE DOWNHILL TREK TO VAISHNO DEVI BHAWAN BEGINS.

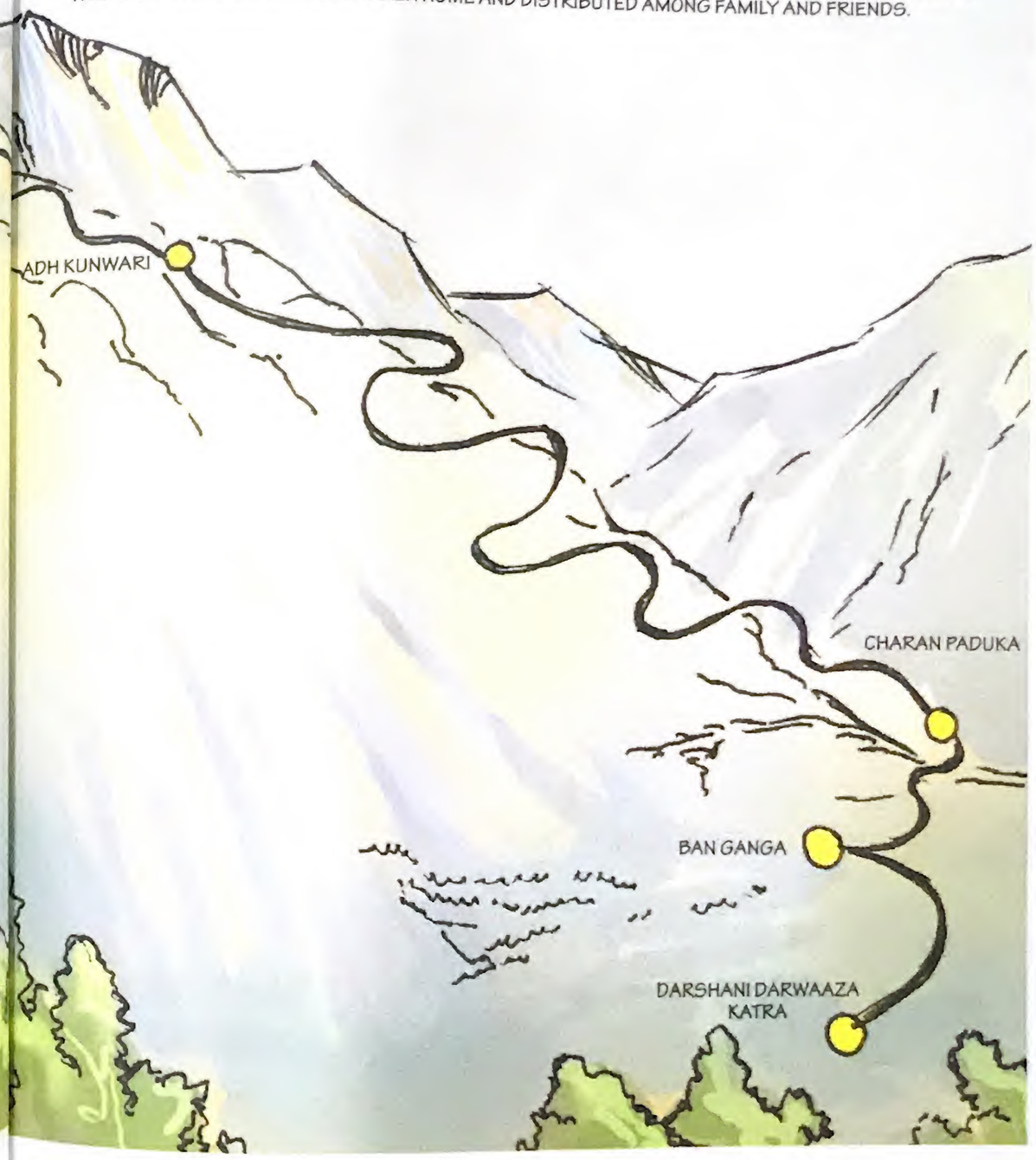


AMRIT KUND

THIS PLACE STORES THE SACRED WATER CALLED 'CHARANAMRIT' WHICH FLOWS FROM THE FEET OF THE THREE PINDIES. DEVOTEES TAKE THIS HOLY WATER BACK WITH THEM AS IT IS BELIEVED TO PURIFY THEIR HEARTS AND HOMES.*

*THE ROCK FORM OF THE GODDESS

THE TOTAL DISTANCE TO THE SHRINE AT VAISHNO DEVI, STARTING FROM KATRA, IS 13 KMS. PILGRIMS PREFER WALKING THE ENTIRE DISTANCE, THOUGH THERE ARE OTHER OPTIONS AVAILABLE. ONE CAN CHOOSE TO UNDERTAKE THE JOURNEY ON A PONY, IN A PALANQUIN AND ALSO BY HELICOPTER.

ALL PILGRIMS GET A SPECIALLY MINTED COIN CALLED KHAZANA. THE COINS HAVE THE IMAGE OF THE THREE PINDIES ON IT. THE COIN IS SAID TO BRING PROSPERITY TO THE OWNER.

WALNUTS ARE AN ESSENTIAL PART OF THE 'PRASADA' OR SACRED GIFT THAT IS GIVEN TO THE PEOPLE WHO VISIT THE SHRINE. THIS IS TAKEN HOME AND DISTRIBUTED AMONG FAMILY AND FRIENDS.